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Joan of Arc's Ring: A Question of Possession and Cultural Patrimony

K. Michelle Hearne Arthur, Ph.D.

If the old adage that possession is nine tenths of the law is indeed correct, then Mr. Philippe de Villiers, founder of the Puy du Fou historical theme park near Nantes, has clearly won his case for a small silver-gilt ring taken from Joan of Arc by the English Cardinal Henry Beaufort during her 1430-31 imprisonment. The Cardinal was present, and instrumental, in the trial and execution of the Maid of Orleans in 1431, and the ring has remained in private hands in England since that time.¹

The British government claimed that the ring is an object of English national patrimony and thus is subject to an export license in which an English buyer will have the option to block the transfer of the ring to another country.² A 2015 law states that any object worth more than £150,000 requires an export permit. This type of art-related law case is not unusual; they appear in the media quite regularly. Nazi reparations, such as the return of the portrait of Adele Bloch Bauer by Gustav Klimt formerly in the Belvedere Art Museum in Vienna to its rightful owners, are the most readily recalled. However, what makes this case special is the importance of the historical figure whose possession of the ring is in question.³

Visually, the object in question is quite modest. It is a simple silver-gilt ring (now silver) without any stones. The only embellishment are some niello filled lozenges and triangles appearing to be three crosses and, on the two rectangular fields of the bezel the abbreviations "IHS" and "MAR", standing for the names Jesus and Maria. There is some wear to the ring. It resides in a simple wooden casket surmounted by a wooden cross and lined with red velvet that may have been made specifically to hold the ring.⁴

On 25 February 2016, Philippe de Villiers purchased from Timeline Auctions in London this silver-gilt ring and its late medieval wooden casket, authenticated and identified by English scholars as having been the communion ring of Joan of Arc.⁵ According to the catalogue entry, the ring was given by Joan on the eve of her execution to the English Cardinal Henry Beaufort, who held the keys to her prison cell and happened to be the highest ranking Englishman at Joan's trial and execution.⁶

It may be safe to assume that the sellers did not anticipate that a right wing French politician who built his fortune creating a theme park consisting of nationalistic historical recreations, would purchase the ring in order to put it on display. Once Villiers purchased the ring, he promptly had it sent to France using a provision in the export legislation which allows free travel of objects within the

¹ At the time of this article's publication the legal battle between Mr. de Villiers and the English government over the right to the ring is about to begin.

² Martin Bailey, "France and Britain prepare for battle over Joan of Arc's ring". *The Art Newspaper*. 16 March 2016. For information on current export license criteria and regulations in the UK see http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Export_guidance_archaeological.pdf.

³ This article does not solve or answer the political and legal debates. It seeks to put into historical context some of the issues of gender politics and law that underlie the current controversy.

⁴ For a photograph of the ring, see Medieval Joan of Arc Devotional Ring with Casket and Documents. Lot 1220. TimeLine Auctions. 25 February 2016. <http://www.timelineauctions.com/lot/joan-of-arc-devotional-ring-with-casket-and-documents/62068/>

⁵ Medieval Joan of Arc Devotional Ring with Casket and Documents. Lot 1220. TimeLine Auctions. 25 February 2016.

⁶ The auction catalogue gives the following provenance: Cardinal Beaufort gave the ring to Henry VI. The English king then gave the ring to his half-brother Edmond Tudor, who married the cardinal's niece Lady Margaret Beaufort. It then descended through the Cavendish-Bentinck Family (the Duke of Portland) until 1914 when Lady Ottoline Morrell gave it to Augustus John before 1914. At some point the ring changed hands and was sold at Sotheby's as part of the 1929 sale of F.A. Harman Oats collection. It was then in a private collection from 1929-47 and then acquired at another Sotheby's sale (1 April 1947) by Dr. James Hasson of Harley Street London, who subsequently passed it on to his son, who then sold it at TimeLine Auctions this year.

European Union. However, once the world at large found out that the ring was now in France, through a very public and pageant filled presentation at Villiers' park in March 2016, the U.K. Arts Council demanded that the ring be returned to English soil as the proper export papers had not been obtained.⁷ Initially, Villiers refused to do so. However, when faced with a million pound fine and six years in prison, Villiers had the ring returned to England in April.⁸ Villiers then made a rapid personal appeal to Queen Elizabeth to intervene. The appeal speaks of France and England's common history and reminds the queen that several of her predecessors, including Queen Victoria, intended to return the ring to France. Should that happen, his intent was to publically display the relic.⁹ Fourteen days later the ring was returned to France. Puy de Fou has announced that the ring will be housed in a newly-built structure outside the gates of the park and will be available for viewing by the general public for free.

It is interesting to note that most of the media coverage criticizing the ring's return immediately after this event was by UK and Anglophone sources. Following the ring's final return to France in May the majority of the coverage has been in French and Francophone sources. In fact, within that language gap there can be found a stark disparity of opinions about the ring. French periodicals and web pages hail the return of a sacred relic. The English and Anglophone periodicals and web pages have begun to heavily promote the idea that the ring is a fake, a nineteenth century forgery.¹⁰

To begin to grasp the significance of this object to the French psyche, one must first understand the full import of the Maid of Orleans within the context of French history and culture.¹¹ Born in January 1412 to a prosperous peasant family in Domremy, by the time she was thirteen she had been seeing visions of Archangel Michael, Saint Margaret and Saint Catherine. They urged her to seek out the French dauphin, Charles VII, and assist him in restoring French rule to the peoples of France, which had fallen under the control of the English at this point in the Hundred Years' War. Having convinced the young king of the authenticity of her visions, Charles VII's first commission for Joan was to break the English siege of Orleans. Dressed in the white armor of a soldier, which had been provided by the French royal court, she led a contingent of French troops and defeated the English at Orleans in April 1429. Her military successes paved the way for Charles VII to be officially crowned King of France in Reims. After the coronation, which Joan attended, she lobbied the new king for troops to retake Paris. She was denied, possibly because of the king's belief that the troops' devotion to her was a threat to his authority. When she was captured by the Burgundian political faction in 1430, the French crown declined to pay her ransom. However, the English in order to attempt to regain their hold on France, both physical and legal, they jumped at the opportunity to "purchase" Joan from her Burgundian captors. She was subsequently ransomed by the English, tried, convicted of heresy and burned at the stake. The records of her trial were meticulously kept. Initially verbatim transcriptions in French were taken, but as the trial progressed and Joan continued to be able to defend herself with some success, the record taking shifted to Latin translations of all of the questioning sessions.

⁷ For a video of the presentation, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MNqchY6Mrrs>.

⁸ <http://www.franceinlondon.com/en-Article-1202-Joan-of-Arcs-ring-on-the-verge-of-a-new-Hundred-Years-War-Culture--Puy-du-Fou-Arts-Council.html>

⁹ The letter is reproduced as an embedded document in an article by the newspaper, *Ouest-France*. www.ouest-france.fr/pays-de-la-loire/vendee/puy-du-fou-langleterre-renonce-recuperer-lanneau-de-jeanne-darc-4208416&prev=search

¹⁰ <http://theartnewspaper.com/news/british-doubts-over-joan-of-arc-s-ring/>. For a fuller discussion of the controversy see www.stjeannedarc.net

¹¹ The complete historiography of biographical studies of Joan of Arc is voluminous. Among the most thorough is Regine Pernoud and Veronique Clin, *Joan of Arc: Her Story*. Translated and Revised by Jeremy duQuesnay Adams. New York: St. Martin's Press. 1998. Transcripts of her Condemnation and Nullification Trials were first published in the 1840s by Jules Quicherat, *Procès de condamnation et de réhabilitation de Jeanne d'Arc*. 5 vols. Paris: Renouard, (1849). They can also be found on line through the St. Joan of Arc Center at <http://www.stjoan-center.com/Trials/> and <http://www.stjoan-center.com/Trials/index.html#nullification>

Even by medieval inquisitorial standards, the circumstances of Joan's trial were questionable. Legal fictions were employed throughout the process to ensure the result desired by the English king, Henry VI. One of the relatively lesser improprieties was the location where Joan was held during the pendency of her trial. As the trial was an ecclesiastical and not secular matter and Joan was being tried according to canon law in an ecclesiastical court, she was required to be held in an ecclesiastical prison. Such prisons were less harsh, especially for the so-called "weaker sex", than typical secular prisons, which were filled with violent offenders and male guards, who had a tendency to violate female prisoners. Joan was held in a tower chamber in the castle at Bouvreuil, the residence of Richard Beauchamp, the Earl of Warwick.¹² However, because of the technicality that only the presiding Bishop, Pierre Cauchon, held the key to her cell, it was claimed that Joan's prison met the requirements of holding only those on trial in the canon courts. The reality was that she was being held in a regular prison and on several occasions was forced to "defend her honor" when faced with rapacious guards who had seemingly unfettered access to her cell.

The location of her trial was moved under dubious pretext to a pro-English location and the presiding judge, Bishop Pierre Cauchon, was given authority under equally dubious pretexts. Cauchon, an English sympathizer and employee of the crown, was determined to preside over Joan's trial.¹³ He came to an agreement with the English Duke of Bedford as to where Joan would be tried. According to the rules of tribunals of the inquisition, a person must be judged either by the bishop of his or her birthplace or in the diocese in which the crime of heresy was committed.¹⁴ This would have located the trial either in the diocese of Dijon, where Joan had been born, or in the diocese of Beauvais, as Joan had been captured by the Burgundians there. While as its bishop, Cauchon could have legitimately tried Joan in Beauvais, both regions were under the control of the French crown, Beauvais having recently surrendered to the French king. Cauchon's solution was to make an agreement with the Duke of Bedford wherein Joan would be tried in Rouen, a long-time English strong hold. As the Bishop of Beauvais, Cauchon did not have the right to preside over the case. That is, until Bedford arranged with the pro-English ecclesiastical authorities in Rouen to grant him a "commission of territory", essentially a building or plot of land over which he had sovereignty, in a manner similar to modern embassies which although located in a foreign country are still considered to be part of their home country. Thus Cauchon was able to preside over the trial in a pro-English territory.

The trial lasted five months. Ultimately, Joan was convicted not of theological heresy but of the crime of wearing men's clothing. Two days after Joan was forced to swear that she would no longer wear male garb she was found dressed again in a doublet and hose. There are two explanations as to why Joan chose to do this. The first is that her female clothing had been stolen by the guards and male clothing was placed in her cell instead. Her only choice would have been to go naked or wear men's clothing. The modest Maid, who prized her virgin status as a mark of her holiness, opted for the latter. The second possibility is that dressed in women's clothing she was far more vulnerable to violation by the English prison guards. There is at least one documented instance in which guards attempted to rape her while she was imprisoned.¹⁵ Joan describes her use of men's clothing during the period of

¹² Regine Pernoud and Veronique Clin, *Joan of Arc: Her Story*. Translated and Revised by Jeremy duQuesnay . . . New York: St. Martin's Press. 1998. P. 101.

¹³ See Richard A. Newhall. "Payment to Pierre Cauchon for Presiding at the Trial of Jeanne d'Arc". *Speculum* Vol. 9, No. 1 (Jan., 1934), pp. 88-91 for a list of payments, amounts, and services rendered by Cauchon on behalf of the English.

¹⁴ Ibid, pp. 100 ff.

¹⁵ Martin Ladevenu affirms that "someone approached her secretly at night; I have heard from Joan's own mouth that an English lord entered her cell and tried to take her by force". Ibid., p. 132.

her life when she lived and fought with the French troops as being motivated by convenience and her own safety.¹⁶

It is difficult to imagine that a woman as devout as Joan who risked her life time and time again in order to restore the French monarchy to power would willingly give to her English captor the ring given to her by her parents to commemorate her first communion.¹⁷ As the highest ranking representative of King Henry VI, The English Cardinal Henry Beauford believed that he had a right to the ring because the English “purchased” Joan (and her possessions on hand) as a prisoner of war. Joan was purchased by the English for 10,000 crowns.¹⁸ Captured by the Burgundian Faction outside of Paris in 1430, Joan was first offered to the French King, Charles VII. Charles rejected the opportunity to free Joan.¹⁹ While in the modern era the idea of paying ransom to release a prisoner or captive is anathema, during the Middle Ages it was an accepted and regularly used tenet of the chivalric code for war.²⁰ For example, King John II of France was captured by the English during the Battle of Poitiers in 1356. He was held for four years and released in May of 1360 in exchange for the sum of three million crowns as well as the ceding of a third of western France. *The Book of Deeds of Arms and of Chivalry*, a didactic text for princes written by Christine de Pizan around 1410, has an entire section on this practice.²¹ It also discusses the proper method to distribute captured booty. “As the armed men are rightfully paid by the king or prince, that whatever they capture should belong to the lord, whether it be a prisoner or other booty.”²²

However, as Joan was female, there is an additional significance in Beauford’s ability to dispose of her (and her objects) as he will. In the Middle Ages, women were considered to be possessions without legal rights. Before they are married women are legally considered to be possessions of their fathers, until such time as they have a husband, who then takes legal responsibility for them and gains all right and title to the objects that they own. Having been formed from Adam’s rib and not the stuff of the Earth as Adam had been, women were believed to be weak, impulsive, and easily swayed by evil in addition to having inferior cognitive and intellectual abilities.²³ The Bible was frequently cited as the basis for inherent masculine dominance and feminine submission. I Corinthians 11:3, “But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God”, was frequently used to explain this “so-called” natural order of

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 133.

¹⁷ The trial transcripts of March 17 include a section in which Joan was questioned about this ring, that she describes as being not of fine material, engraved with “Iesu Maria” and having been given to her in Domremy. See *Trial Transcripts*. Fifth Session. March 1. XLIII. <http://faculty.smu.edu/bwheeler/ijas/1431trial.html>.

¹⁸ Joan of Arc, p. 95.

¹⁹ At the urging of his advisors, Charles chose to reject the opportunity to ransom the Maid. The most likely explanation for this choice was that the charismatic Joan had begun to be seen as a threat to the king’s stability. She has been described as being extremely charismatic and as she had been able to rally an army around her once to put Charles on the throne, it was conceivable that she could do it again. Further the English had already begun a campaign to discredit Joan as having heard either evil voices or her own imagined personages who had urged her to go to battle. As a “Most Christian King” whose place as monarch was divinely appointed, to have been placed on the thrown by a heretic fully discredited his legitimate status as king within the context of his peers (the other “divinely appointed” monarchs of Europe). Advisors believed that to distance himself as much as possible from Joan was his best chance of international acceptance of his legitimate place as the ruler of France in place of Henry VI, who had already been granted that right by his oft-times mad father’s, Charles VI’s, desperate treaty that granted the throne to young Henry VI.

²⁰ Only noble or high value (either tactical or monetary) prisoners captured on the battle field or in contested areas had the option of being released in exchange for a sum of money. While they were held captive, the prisoner was held in comfortable if not palatial surroundings until such time as enough funds could be raised to secure their release.

²¹ Christine de Pizan. Sumner Willard, trans. Charity Cannon Willard, ed. *The Book of Deeds of Arms and of Chivalry*. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania University Press, 1999, pp. 174-5.

²² Ibid P. 167.

²³ For extensive discussion on this topic see, Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, ed. *Silences of the Middle Ages*. Vol 2 of *A History of Women*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press. 1992. P. 89 ff.

feminine submission to masculine control. Corporal punishment of daughters and wives was acceptable and in many places the norm.²⁴

Besides being seen as lesser creatures, women were bartered, betrothed, and married off to seal and/or strengthen political and economic alliances made by their adult family members. For example, the story of Margaret of Austria (1480-1530), Duchess of Savoy, while seeming fantastical falls within cultural norms of the late Middle Ages. The only daughter of Maximilian I (1459-1519), King of the Romans and Holy Roman Emperor, she was betrothed at the age of 3 to the future King of France, Charles VIII (1470-1498) as part of the Treaty of Arras. This betrothal resulted in the very young Margaret being sent away to France to be raised at the court of Charles' father, Louis XI, under the tutelage of a French noblewoman.

However, by the time Margaret had turned ten in 1491, the political landscape had changed dramatically. Louis XI was dead; Charles VIII was king in his own name and was in the midst of waging a bloody war to annex the Duchy of Brittany, then an independent political entity. The Ducal crown had recently been inherited by twelve year old Anne (1476-1514), daughter of the previous Duke, Francis II. Anne's military forces were not strong enough to defeat the French and a stalemate was reached. Charles, determined to add Brittany to the crown territories, accepted a solution in which he would marry the Duchess Anne, who would then become Queen of France; Brittany would pass to their children. Unable to defeat the superior French forces, who had already overrun Nantes, the ducal capital, Anne accepted the offer. In order to affect this marriage and the much sought after annexation of Brittany, Charles' betrothal with Margaret was annulled and she was sent back to Austria, away from her home for the past seven years in the royal court of France.²⁵ At the age of sixteen, in 1497 Margaret was sent to Spain to marry John, Prince of Asturias, in order to cement an alliance between Austria and Spain. After John's sudden death six months later, Margaret returned to Austria. In 1501, she was married to her final husband, Philibert II, Duke of Savoy, as part of an alliance between the respective territories. Like other young noble women, Margaret had little, if any say, in her being sent to three different countries in order to support the shifting Hapsburg family alliances.

Rings have always been considered to be very personal items, linked far more closely with the owner than any other piece of jewelry. Since ancient times signet rings, marriage bands and also rings given as tokens of affection and esteem have been seen as symbols of wealth, power, dynastic affiliations, as well as legal and religious privileges and connections. Additionally, since the Ancient world they have been recognized as symbols of faith in rituals such as investitures, marriages and coronations.²⁶

For example, during the investiture ceremony of a Catholic Bishop a ring is given to the new bishop. Once this has happened he then officially becomes the *sponsus*, husband, of the church and his flock. Rings also are an integral part of royal coronation liturgies. The French coronation *ordo*

²⁴ For example, the thirteenth century, Nicholas Byard, a Dominican, wrote, "A man may chastise his wife and beat her for correction, for she is of his household, therefore the lord may chastise his own." Additionally, the statutes of a town in Gascony state specifically that a man may beat his wife as long as he does not kill her. Marjorie Rowling. *Life in Medieval Times*. New York: Penguin, 1973. P. 72.

²⁵ The situation was further complicated by the fact that Margaret was held essentially as a political prisoner in France for several months before her return. Additionally, the previous year Anne had married by proxy, Margaret's father, Maximilian, in order to obtain troops and funds for her fight against the French. The hoped for troops and funds did not materialize and the Breton resistance was defeated. This marriage, in which the parties had never met, was also quickly annulled so that Charles and Anne could wed.

²⁶ Robert W. Scheller. "Ensigns of Authority: French Royal Symbolism in the Age of Louis XII". *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art*. Vol. 13, No. 2 (1983), pp. 75-141. P. 138..

refers to the ring as a *signaculum fidei*--a symbol of the faith between the monarch and his or her people.²⁷

In the case of this ring, presuming that it was given to Joan on the occasion of her first communion, it can then be seen as a symbol of her commitment to Christ. Within the context of her religious devotion, this ring is a very real and tangible symbol of the bond between herself and Christ, her bride groom. It also becomes a locus of Joan of Arc as a symbol of French nationalism and pride as is directly evidenced by Maître Temoillet de Villiers' description of the ring described Joan of Arc's ring as "a nationalist symbol [and] a little piece of hope" at the public presentation of the ring at Puy du Fou in France in the spring of 2016.²⁸

Since the nineteenth century Joan of Arc has been used as a symbol of French nationalism. She has been co-opted by many different sides: Napoleon, the July Monarchy, the Second Empire, Vichy France, the French Resistance, and now the Front National. Each group has chosen to emphasize various aspects of her historical personage, the ideals she fought for (kingship, freedom from foreigners, piety), and current cultural ideals of womanhood (modesty, piety, patience). She was used by the French patriarchy for a series of reasons and ideals to be their symbol.

For approximately 300 years after her exoneration, Joan of Arc was largely forgotten. She was a minor historical figure, no longer part of current events or political dialogues. All that changed when in 1730 François-Marie Arouet, better known to modern readers as Voltaire, composed an ostensibly satirical poem about her life.²⁹ Much of *The Maid of Orleans*, was louche if not down-right pornographic. The woodcuts that accompanied the publication showed scenes such as a bawdy and scantily clad peasant girl tumbling in a rumpled bed with a male companion. This scandalous and defamatory poem brought the former national hero and martyr back to the attention of the public. In the nineteenth century two publications resuscitated the Maid's reputation. In the 1840s, historian Jules-Etienne-Joseph Quicherat edited and published the original manuscripts of her two trials.³⁰ In 1855, Jules Michelet devoted an entire volume to her life and trials in his History of France series.³¹

The first public sculptures of Joan were erected in the nineteenth century. The first, carved by sculptor Edme Etienne Francois Gois was created in 1801 and had little relation to how she actually appeared. This imagined depiction posed the saint in a long, flowing gown with windswept curls of hair behind her. In reality Joan wore her hair cut short in the manner of fashionable young men and wore masculine attire from the start of her quest to return France to French rule.³²

Joan is frequently shown as being vulnerable, sometimes a powerless prisoner of simpering piety and graceful curves or as a wild, Amazonian woman with long, curly tresses billowing in the wind. It is not until 1874 that she appears in armor and on horseback, although even then, prominently displayed in Emmanuel Fremiet's sculpture are her streaming locks that serve as a visual marker of her gender. Her long hair serves both to signify her youth as an unmarried girl and the impropriety of

²⁷ Ernst H. Kantorowicz. *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. 1957. P. 212.

²⁸ Presentation video at 7:50. Maître Temoillet de Villiers. "Événement : l'arrivée de l'anneau de Jeanne d'Arc au Puy du Fou." <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MNqchY6Mrrs>

²⁹ M. Voltaire. *The Maid of Orleans*. 1796. <https://books.google.com/books?printsec=titlepage&id=b3gGAAAAQAAJ&output=html>

³⁰ Jules-Etienne-Joseph Quicherat, ed. *Procès de condamnation et de réhabilitation de Jeanne d'Arc dite la Pucelle. Publiés pour la première fois d'après les manuscrits de la Bibliothèque Nationale, suivis de tous les documents historiques qu'on a pu réunir et accompagnés de notes et d'éclaircissements*. 5 vols. Société de l'Histoire de France (Paris: Jules Renouard, 1841-9; reprinted New York: Johnson, 1965).

³¹ Jules Michelet. *Joan of Arc. History of France*. Vol. 5. 1858. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1967.

³² Nora M. Heimann. *Joan of Arc in French Art and Culture (1700-1855): From Satire to Sanctity*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate. 2005. P. 6.

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her behavior, as proper women in the medieval and Early Modern world wore their hair up and covered.³³

Before the late nineteenth century little if anything was known about Joan's actual appearance and even after the publication of the trial transcripts and research on medieval dress and costume by historians in the nineteenth century, Joan of Arc was portrayed in a manner that best served the agendas of those who borrowed her image rather than with historical authenticity. As early as the 1790s Joan was seen as a heroine of humble birth but nobility of spirit to be emulated by the peasants rising up for liberty and embodying the power of the people. Her image was conflated with Marianne, who was the personification of republican freedom.³⁴

Post-Revolutionary France was filled with fierce factionalism and contentious conflict. On the one side were the counter-revolutionary royalists and priests, matched on the opposite side by disenfranchised Republicans. Finding a symbol of nationalism and unity that all could rally under was a tall order for Napoleon's administration. The previously mentioned 1801 statue of a hyper-feminine Joan, was just such a symbol. She was brave but humble - a symbol of martial strength and national unity against a common foe.³⁵ Yet during the Bourbon Restoration Joan became a figure of suffering, embodying grief and loss following civil war. Her imprisonment was a symbol of the losses sustained by the church and the entire French people. During the July Monarchy (1830-48), Joan changed yet again. This era of industry and commercialism dominated by the rise of the bourgeois created a Joan who was modest, pious and sincere. She was a fragile and saintly feminine ideal.³⁶

It was during this period that one of the best known images of her was created: a large sculpture designed by Marie d'Orleans, the French princess trained as a sculptor. This saccharine standing bronze embraces both masculine and feminine cultural norms combined with a nod to some historical accuracy. Joan's hair is cut in a page-boy style; shorter than what a woman would wear but still longer than what a man wore. She wears a long skirt below full plate armor on her torso and arms. She holds a sword against her breast as she bows her head. Behind her is a stump holding her helmet and gloves. This image embodies all of the characteristics so desired in the 1830s. She is pious, modest, and feminine. This image of her prevailed through the Pre-Raphaelite and Art Nouveau movements. She was tall, willowy, feminine, brave, pure, pious, mystical, and noble. An otherworldly quality especially can be found in the images from the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth century. Many paintings of Joan having her visions were created during this period. Shortly thereafter, in 1920, Joan was canonized.

Back to the present era, wherein the debate over legal possession of the Ring is occurring. Embedded in the auction catalogue is video sales blurb by Auctioneer Tim Wonnacot, extolling the historical importance of the ring. He closes his pitch by saying that the French government must bid for the ring as it is an object of national importance for France. This urging then becomes an imagined bidding war, recreating the Hundred Years' War, between an English bidder and the French government.³⁷

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid, p. 47

³⁵ Ibid., P. 86.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 100.

³⁷ Op. Cit. Auction Cat.

The British government's claim, following Villiers' return of the ring to France, that the ring being an object of national patrimony, is tenuous at best. The primary piece of evidence given by the Arts Council is that it has been on English soil for roughly five hundred years. However, if one is to enter into evidence the historical facts, one would find that the ring has a great significance for France as Joan, now sainted, is credited as being a savior of France (from the English no less). This ring is one of the few surviving physical objects connected to her body.³⁸

This controversy could be seen as a small-scale replication of the ongoing debate over the legality of the British state's possession of the Elgin Marbles (originally created for the Parthenon) currently residing in the British Museum. Purchased by Thomas Bruce, the Seventh Earl of Elgin, the marbles were removed controversially from Greek soil beginning in 1801 and later sold to the British government, who then placed them in the collection of the British Museum. Arguments by the Crown and the British Museum for the legitimacy of their ownership include the paternalistic, and wildly incorrect, assertion that the Greeks are not able to care for the statues properly. However, recent construction by the Greek government of the Acropolis Museum, a state of the art complex built to house the famous sculptures renders that excuse invalid. Their first argument debunked, it has been replaced with the assertion that these sculptures are so culturally significant that they belong to the whole of humanity, more of whom will be able to see them in London than in Athens.

In making the claim of validity based on the number of people who will have access to a cultural object, the British have invalidated their claim to Joan of Arc's ring. It was in a private collection for its entire stay on English soil. The most recent owner, who inherited the ring from his father, recalls how he and his sister used to wear the ring as children while they reenacted Joan's capture, imprisonment, and execution.³⁹

The ring is now on display at Puy du Fou, a historically based theme park in Western France. The park receives approximately two million visitors a year and is the fourth most popular attraction in the country.⁴⁰ The public spectacles recreate significant events in French history, with a sometimes nationalist and Catholic slant. In 1977 by Philippe de Villiers purchased a ruined castle near the village of Les Epesses and created a drama about the history of a fictional noble family. This spectacle was named La Cinescencie and utilizes 4,000 people and 1,200 horses. It is billed as being the largest performance of its kind. The Cinescencie continues to be performed during the summer months, but surrounding it are recreations of a medieval market place, village squares, an eighteenth century chateau, and other pseudo-historical locales. The authenticity is such that guests can elect (for a fee) to stay at one of the four Disney resort style accommodations nearby. One can rest in a Roman Villa, enjoy the rustic simplicity of a Clovis-era keep, bask in the glory of a noble residence from the Enlightenment, or stay in one of the tents from the Field of the Cloth of Gold encampment, that recreates the Renaissance opulence of two of supremely egotistical kings: Francois I and Henry VIII, as they vied for political dominance through lavish expense.⁴¹

³⁸ Her golden armor and banner survived until the French Revolution in the treasury of Saint Denis, Paris. It has been dubiously claimed that her helm still survives and is in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Acc. No. 04.3.241

³⁹ Op. Cit. Auction Cat. Video link.

⁴⁰ Wikipedia, accessed 3/23/16.

⁴¹ Puy de Fou website. <http://www.frontnational.com/2016/04/jeanne-darc-visage-de-la-france-qui-ne-renonce-pas/>
Accessed 3/31/16

One would be remiss in not noting that Viscount Philippe de Villiers, founder and chief of the Puy de Fou, is currently the head of the Mouvement pour la France, a political party that has a reputation for being both nationalistic and Eurosceptic.

The ring's return has been greeted with joy by those on the far right in France, for whom this has become something of a cause célèbre. Front National leader Marine le Pen sent a thank you message on Twitter to Villiers for bringing the ring back to France.

The Maid has been a potent symbol of French national pride and hope and solidarity. She retains her immediacy, having been aggressively adopted by the Front National today. Annually the leadership of the party organizes a public parade and laying of a wreath at her statue in Orleans (the one designed by Fermier) on May 1, the week before her saint day. There are speeches and a public prayer at the foot of the statue. In 2013, due to threats by the Islamic State, the parade was replaced by a private banquet.⁴² For the National Front Joan of Arc, the "modest daughter of the people", is a symbol of perseverance and optimism for French freedom. From 2012 to 2014 French former movie star, Brigitte Bardot made several public comparisons of Marine le Pen, leader of the Front National, and Joan of Arc, both of whom in her opinion stand against the control and influence of the English/US and NATO world.

An official video recording of the March spectacle unveiling the ring's return to France includes interviews of members of the crowd.⁴³ The anonymous reporter asks several people the question, "Who is Joan of Arc for France?" The answer of a young man speaks volumes. After stating that she is the patron saint of France he tells us that "she is a model for all of the girls and young women of France."⁴⁴

Dr. Arthur spent nine years with the Department of Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts at The Morgan Library in New York. Additionally, she also co-authored, The Hours of Henry the VIII: A Renaissance Masterpiece by Jean Poyet, which received the Art Library's Society of North America's George Wittenborn Award for best art book. Dr. Arthur has taught at SUNY New Paltz, SUNY Oneonta, and Hartwick College. She has also been the consulting curator for the Yager Museum of Art and Culture at Hartwick College.

⁴² <http://www.frontnational.com/2016/04/jeanne-darc-visage-de-la-france-qui-ne-renonce-pas/>

⁴³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MNqchY6Mrrs>.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 2:21.